Expected Health Benefits of the Carnivore Diet

Insights from the Harvard Study (2020)

Overview

The 2020 Harvard study surveyed 2,029 adults adhering to a carnivore diet (median duration: 14 months) to evaluate self-reported health outcomes. Participants, primarily motivated by health goals (93%), excluded nearly all plant foods, focusing on animal products. Below are the key health benefits observed for the average participant.

Key Health Benefits

1. **Weight Loss and Improved Metabolic Health**
    - **BMI Reduction**: Median BMI decreased from **27.2** (overweight/obese) to **24.3** (normal range).
    - **Diabetes Management**: Participants with diabetes reported a **median 0.4% drop in HbA1c** (a marker of long-term blood sugar control), with **84–100% reducing or discontinuing medications**.
2. **Favorable Lipid Profile (with Caveats)**
    - **Optimal HDL and Triglycerides**: HDL cholesterol (68 mg/dL) and triglycerides (68 mg/dL) aligned with cardiometabolic health.
    - **Elevated LDL Cholesterol**: LDL cholesterol rose to 172 mg/dL, a potential concern for cardiovascular risk, though the **TG/HDL ratio (1.0)** suggested insulin sensitivity.
3. **Improvements in Chronic Conditions**
    - **Autoimmune and Digestive Disorders**: 48–98% reported resolution or improvement in conditions like arthritis, IBS, and skin issues.
    - **Mental Health**: 45% cited better mental clarity, focus, and reduced symptoms of anxiety or depression.
4. **Enhanced Subjective Well-Being**
    - **Energy and Physical Performance**: 66–91% noted increased energy, endurance, and strength.
    - **Sleep Quality**: 76% reported improved sleep patterns.
5. **Low Adverse Effects**
    - Mild gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., diarrhea, constipation) occurred in **3–5.5%** of participants.
    - Severe nutrient deficiency signs (e.g., hair loss, skin issues) were rare (<2%).

Considerations and Limitations

- **Nutritional Adequacy**: Despite minimal plant intake, deficiency symptoms were uncommon, possibly due to organ meat consumption (42% weekly) or metabolic adaptation.
- **Long-Term Risks**: Elevated LDL cholesterol and unanswered questions about bone health, gut microbiota, and cardiovascular outcomes require further study.

Conclusion

For the average participant, the carnivore diet was associated with significant short-term benefits, including weight loss, metabolic improvements, and relief from chronic conditions.